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Getting to the Heart of the Matter:

An Examination of Swimmers' Appraisals of Organizational Stressors

Cognitive appraisal is the intra-individual mechanism that lies at “the theoretical heart of psychological stress” (Lazarus, 1999, p. 61). It has been suggested that further research is needed to explore the explanatory potential of cognitive appraisal and its role in the organizational stress process in athletes (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). Therefore, this study explored sport performers' cognitive appraisals of organizational stressors. More specifically, the situational properties underlying stressors and the transactional alternatives (stress appraisals) that 13 national standard swimmers experienced in relation to each property were investigated. Data were collected and analyzed using daily diaries over a 28-day period of training and competition. The results reveal that swimmers appraise a wide range of organizational stressors in different ways and that they appear to experience both challenge and threat states in response to similar or different situations. Furthermore, support was found for the majority of situational properties of stressors, thus extending general psychology literature to the sport psychology domain. Imminence had the greatest proportion of threatening appraisals, novelty had the greatest proportion of challenging appraisals, and duration had the greatest proportion of harm/loss appraisals. By investigating the transactional alternatives experienced in relation to each situational property, this study furthers understanding of cognitive appraisal in sport performers and highlights its pivotal role in the organizational stress process. Furthermore, underlying properties may provide a universal understanding of the causes of stress in sport and may offer useful information for sport psychology consultants by serving as the basis for sport psychology interventions.

References

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